

CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2006

WILLIAM A. BRIGGS BUILDING (REED CONFERENCE ROOM)

845 PARK AVENUE

EXECUTIVE SESSION: 5:30 P.M.

**PUBLIC MEETING: IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING EXECUTIVE
SESSION**

**PUBLIC WORK SESSION: IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING
PUBLIC MEETING**

MINUTES

A special meeting of the Cranston School Committee was held on the evening of the above date at the William A. Briggs Building in the Reed Conference Room with the following members present: Mrs. Greifer, Ms. Iannazzi, Mr. Lupino, Mr. Stycos, and Mr. Traficante. Mr. Archetto and Mr. Palumbo were absent with cause. Also present were Mr. Scherza, Mr. Nero, Mr. Balducci, and Mr. Votto.

The meeting was called to order at 5:40 p.m. It was moved by Mrs. Greifer, seconded by Mr. Traficante and unanimously carried that the members adjourn to Executive Session pursuant to RI State Law 42-46-5(a)(1) and contract and litigation pursuant to RI State Law 42-46-5(a)(2).

Mr. Lupino, acting Chair, reconvened the meeting at 7:01 p.m.

The roll was called.

Mr. Lupino stated for the record that Mr. Archetto and Mr. Palumbo were excused.

I. Executive Session Minutes Sealed – October 11, 2006

Moved by Mrs. Greifer, seconded by Mr. Traficante and unanimously carried that the October 11, 2006 Executive Session minutes remain confidential.

II. Adjourn to Public Work Session

Moved by Mrs. Greifer, seconded by Mr. Traficante and unanimously carried that the meeting be adjourned to the public work session.

There being no further business to come before the meeting, it was adjourned to the work session at 7:03 p.m.

Page 2 October 11, 2006

1. Middle School Reform Committee Report

Mrs. Judy Lundsten, Mr. Norman Laliberte, and Mr. Dennis Morrell were present for this portion of the work session. Mr. Laliberte stated that he and Mr. Morrell would explain to the committee where they are in the middle school reform process. He stated that this committee met several times during the summer, and they reflected on the visits they had made to the middle schools at the end of last year as well as investigate the needs of the current middle schools. A copy of their presentation to the committee is attached for the record. Mr. Laliberte noted that Breaking Ranks in the Middle is the latest research on middle schools, and they are using this as a way to judge where the middle schools in Cranston are and what changes need to be made in them. It is also about the recent legislation that is about to pass. It is based on the secondary reform that was done, and it is now coming down to the middle schools. Advisories will have to begin in the middle school area, and they can see the importance of it recently with the shootings that have taken place in several schools throughout the country. The importance of this personalization piece is that the students get an opportunity to talk with a significant adult. That is being discussed as part of this group. All of the principals have received it as well, so the principals at the middle school level are using their faculty meetings to break this book into parts and are going over the recommendations in this book with their faculty.

Each school has included in their school improvement plan a plan that will align their school with Breaking Ranks in the Middle. The committee has developed a timeline that will provide the

superintendent as well as the School Committee with the recommendations regarding personalization, the leadership structure at the middle school level, and the organizational structures at the schools by December 31st. The committee will be provided with another update in November as to where they stand and will provide the final recommendations in December. They are recommendations only, and are nothing more than that.

Mr. Lupino asked how many people are on the committee, and Mr. Laliberte responded that there are six from teachers and administrators and six appointed by the Cranston Teachers' Alliance. Mr. Lupino stated that he assumed that they all read Breaking Ranks, and asked if there was any dissension. He asked why they were using this book as their bible as compared to something else. Mr. Morrell responded that this committee looked at Turning Points 2000 which was updated to Turning Points 2005 and Breaking Ranks in the Middle. Basically they are two documents that dovetail. This is all the latest research that is out there as far as how to provide middle school students with the best education possible. He added that copies of this book were available for the School Committee. This group found that many of the things are already being done in Cranston such as the structure of the school day, the academics being provided, and the activities provided to the students, and the staffing. Cranston does personalize its education now. There are groups of students meeting with

teachers whether it is the PLP Programs, Student Council, coaching, or activities. They now have to develop a formal advisory program. The middle school teachers have been taking the information in Breaking Ranks and doing it, but now they are going to align it within the three schools by aligning the curriculum in the three middle schools and aligning the curriculum and organizational structures and leadership structures so that the three schools will have the same opportunities and educational programs.

Mr. Laliberte stated that this came about as a result of the fact that the department chair positions were not filled before this year. They are now looking at what the organizational structures are that need to be there for kids to meet with success both academically and socially. They are using Breaking Ranks as a resource as well as the visits to other middle schools that are very successful middle schools. Mr. Morell added that the committee is also analyzing a lot of data so that much of what they are discussing is not fly-by-night data. They are looking at test scores from the three middle schools, the SALT Reports, etc. to see where their weak spots are and what they are going to do in using this document as a springboard to make themselves look better than what they already are. That is why the committee chose Breaking Ranks. Mr. Laliberte commented that just like they are doing at the high schools they want the middle schools to look more alike than different. That doesn't mean that structurally

they should all be the same. How they go about delivering some of the services they deliver may differ, but they do want them to be very similar so that when a child moves from one middle school to another there isn't a big difference in their program. Mr. Morrell also stated that it is not a cookie cutter program they are developing because a lot of their discussion has been that each of the middle schools are unique. They have their own culture, their own tradition, and serve their own population, but they want to make sure that what they present them is all the same. How the staff, teachers, and principals develop it, it is up to them to take it and make sure it gets out there.

Mr. Lupino asked if the model in the book is still the grades 6, 7, and 8 configuration, and Mr. Morrell commented that it is. Mr. Lupino commented that he hears some rumblings that there is a move to bring sixth graders back to the elementary level. Mr. Morrell stated that then it would not be a true middle school program. Mr. Laliberte added that there have been no discussions on this subject.

Mr. Scherza stated that one crucial thing that everyone shouldn't lose sight of is that Mrs. Lundsten, Mr. Nero, himself, and the two high school principals had their face-to-face meeting with the Commissioner's office last week, and they were informed at that time that these regulations were being promulgated by the Board of Regents and that they were based on Breaking Ranks and that they would mirror the high schools. They asked this group if they wanted to be the cooks or be on the menu which means the district either

does it or they will do it to them. This committee grew out of the collective bargaining with the teachers, and it is a good-faith effort to come to what is the best way

Page 4 October 11, 2006

of middle schooling. It wasn't because of dollars and cents alone or because of power; it is what is a true form of a middle school that should be provided in Cranston.

Mr. Laliberte indicated that both sides have agreed to bring in other people who can help make the decisions; teachers and other administrators who have some ideas about the middle school philosophy. He asked the School Committee to keep in mind that a lot of what the district had already was based on middle school philosophy so this is not completely new to the middle schools. Mr. Morrell stated that the first document was Breaking Ranks, and that is what they based the high school reform on, and this is the second document, Breaking Ranks in the Middle.

Mr. Morrell further commented that the three key things this committee is looking at are the personalizations, leadership structures, and the organizations. With regard to personalization, the committee realizes that there are structures such as the teaming that goes on in the middle school which is also a form of personalizing

education because the students all have a team. They decided to focus the rest of their work on the development of an advisory program keeping in mind that 2006-2007 will be the planning year for the advisories and that will be the priority for each of the three middle schools. They will be given different models of advisory programs that are available. Each high school has an advisory program, and they will rework that and bring it down to the middle level. It will be left up to the discretion of each school staff along with their principal and School Improvement Team to best adapt that advisory to their school to meet their unique needs. There are thirty teachers and administrators involved who are enrolled in a course that meets on Wednesday afternoons through Rhode Island College. This course meets at Bain Middle School, and they are working on developing an advisory program. He reinforced the fact that it is data driven and research based. This committee will align the advisory program in scope and content and will structure it for each of the middle schools. That will be their main recommendation to the School Committee. He added that as a program supervisor the curriculum in Cranston is superior. The support that they have received from administration and the School Committee has allowed them to develop curriculum where people call them from other districts asking to look at what is being done in Cranston. The comprehensive guidance curriculum which is a hallmark for the state, the music curriculum, and the English/language arts curriculum are sought after. The curriculum will be aligned so that the delivery of instruction is not forgotten.

Mr. Laliberte commented that when this committee comes before the School Committee in November they will have what they consider to be a good job description for a team leader. Right now the team leader does a variety of things. They are also looking at not department chairs as they once were, but they can see a need for a content specialist at the middle school. Mr. Traficante asked when the state will come forward with their middle school reform, and Mr. Scherza responded that they had their last hearings last week, and they will vote on it at the next Board of Regents' meeting. He believed it

Page 5 October 11, 2006

would go into effect for next September but wasn't sure. The Commissioner's office indicated that this will happen, and there will also be "D" tracking. This will cut down on the number of AEP, Honors, A level, B level, and Comprehensive level classes. One part of the reform requirement is "D" tracking. Mr. Laliberte added that many systems in the state have already done it. Cranston has started to do it in the sense that they have reduced some of their levels, but in the middle schools there are still three levels. A true middle school would not have those levels. It would look more like an elementary setup where there would be totally integrated classes.

Mr. Traficante stated that this would penalize those students who are in high honors and advanced classes. Mr. Scherza responded that it

would not affect them at all because research shows that good students do better with heterogeneous grouping than they do with homogeneous grouping. Mr. Morrell noted that some colleges are changing, and one example is Providence College that no longer requires SAT scores for admissions. Mr. Laliberte added that the only group that is still allowed to exist is the AP or honors classes. Mr. Stycos felt that this was a very political dodge.

Mr. Stycos asked what this committee would be looking for from the School Committee. Mr. Laliberte responded that the committee would present a proposal and recommendations that should go into place over a multi-year proposal. This is a planning year now. They have not made any major changes. Next year there may be a couple of changes they want to put into place, and it may have budget ramifications.

Mr. Stycos stated that he was concerned about the foreign language program in the middle schools, and Mr. Laliberte commented that this subject is already on the table. Secondly, Mr. Stycos mentioned that a middle school teacher is supposed to teach five periods, but the way the team is set up, they teach only four; and they do team time. Mr. Morrell stated that the teachers have a fifth period that is an academic period. Mr. Stycos responded that it is supposed to be an instructional period. Mr. Morrell indicated that this is something they are looking at. Mr. Stycos commented that the district has some financial pressures, and in some cases, people are being told to do

what they want during that fifth period. His children would do silent reading, watch the news on TV, etc. Many of the times there wasn't a lot of teaching going on, and the district can't afford those kinds of things. Mr. Morrell responded that with the new regulations coming down it is mandated that there will be a certain number of minutes of instructional time. Mr. Laliberte indicated that there will be job descriptions for the team leader and the content person that this committee will be proposing to the School Committee.

Mr. Stycos asked the definition of leadership structure, and Mr. Morrell said that the committee is drafting proposed job specifications for team leader and a content specialist.

Page 6 October 11, 2006

Mr. Laliberte mentioned that all of the purchases that have been made were purchased out of grants or professional development money. None of it came out of the school budget. Mr. Morrell also added that this committee meets on their own time from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Mr. Scherza told the School Committee that even though this is curriculum development normally to get people to stay after school to do these things costs \$28.00 per person. This has all been voluntary, and the people in the middle schools have committed themselves to this. They have been meeting in the summer and evenings an quite frequently. There is no additional compensation

involved.

Mrs. Greifer stated that the genesis of this was during the negotiating sessions when they had retirements, and the question was asked whether or not these people had to be replaced or would they be better utilized in instructional time. The union was very flexible and open to leaving those positions open while this process was going on. Mr. Morrell responded that this committee is making good headway outlining definite specifications and qualifications, and this is between the union and administration. Mrs. Greifer commented further that the openness and willingness was appreciated because they didn't have to do it. Mr. Scherza stated that by planning ahead it will save the district in resources and dollars in the long run. The School Committee and the CTA at the table had the foresight to get moving on this. It will help the district to have a better product by not doing it in haste in developing it.

2. Lease/Purchase of Musical Instruments

Mr. Scherza stated that administration realized three or four weeks ago in the budget that they had made a mistake in budgeting. They felt it was better to self-report to the School Committee rather than taking the money and spending it on something else educationally or trying to do anything deceptive. The music department has had a five-year program where the School Committee has been budgeting

approximately \$25,000 a year for replacement and purchase of musical equipment. It was rolled over into this current year's budget which would constitute a sixth year. That was never the committee's wish. Administration has identified that it is there, and they want to self-report that they made a mistake and to let the committee know that it is there. Administration wants the School Committee to decide if they want to re-target this money or keep it in the music program. Mr. Stycos commented that even though the lease is over, administration budgeted for it. Mr. Scherza responded that the contract was for five years, and the contract was up.

Mr. Balducci explained that five years ago the committee entered into a five-year lease to purchase a number of musical instruments. Last year was the fifth of that obligation. Unfortunately, when the budget was rolled over, the \$25,000 was rolled into this year thinking that this year was the fifth year. So, at the beginning of the fiscal year, he actually began the process of putting together the purchase orders for those types of

Page 7 October 11, 2006

commitments. He brought this error to Mr. Scherza's attention, and he also had a conversation with Mr. Colozzi, music program supervisor, and told him that it might be an opportunity to continue the program and asked him how he would like to spend the money. He indicated that Mr. Colozzi was present at this work session to

explain to the committee that if he is given the opportunity to expand the program how he would do it. Mr. Colozzi stated that he was hoping that the committee would continue with another five-year lease. He would like to target the Title 1 schools but not exclusively. During his tenure as music program supervisor he has experienced that many of the students in the socio-economically disadvantaged schools cannot afford to rent or purchase musical instruments. He would like to purchase a large amount of good student model instruments that could be paid off over five years. He suggested purchasing violins, violas, cellos, bases, flutes, clarinets, and trombones that will get into the hands of students particularly in Arlington, Gladstone and Edgewood Highland Schools that would never have that opportunity. They would develop a stock pile of instruments that would be on loan to these families for their children to use. Also, a lease/purchase program allows the district to make purchases that they normally wouldn't be able to do. When Mr. DiSano had encouraged the lease/purchase program five years ago, all of a sudden the district found itself well stocked for the first time in twenty years. It was an incredible boost to the district. He noted that the instruments in Cranston schools are well taken care of. All of the music instructors are very conscientious regarding this.

Mr. Traficante asked Mr. Balducci that if this program were continued would they have to go out for a re-bid. Mr. Balducci responded that knowing that this mistake took place, he had a conversation with Mr. Colozzi. His office did go out to bid because he wanted to see how

much money it would cost. Ultimately, it would come before the School Committee for approval. The bids did come in well within the \$25,000 as budgeted this year as year one toward another five-year commitment. It fell within \$20,000 to \$25,000 depending upon what Mr. Colozzi brings forward as a recommendation for the type of instruments that would be purchased. He did begin the process, but he could not piggyback off the old bid. He did test the waters, but there is no commitment until it is approved by the School Committee.

Mr. Lupino stated that he understood it in theory and asked if it would be better if the district owned the commitment. In response, Mr. Colozzi indicated that the district does own the equipment. Mr. Lupino asked if it would make more sense to take the dollars and subsidize someone going out and renting or leasing because it would take the burden off the district having to monitor the equipment, inventory the equipment and being responsible for someone taking the equipment. Mr. Colozzi responded that he and his staff collectively came up with the idea of having a very marginal fee that would be refundable upon the safe return of the instrument at the end of the school year. The fee could be \$50.00 which is far less than a family would have to spend on renting or purchasing an instrument. They would have the parents sign a contract that would state

they would receive \$50.00 back in June upon safe return of the instrument. Mrs. Greifer stated that she felt there had to be some sense of ownership of the instrument that it is not free.

Mr. Stycos asked Mr. Colozzi if he knew how other school systems would handle this type of loan program. Mr. Colozzi responded that there are some school systems that do require a deposit or a user fee. Some have used a non-refundable deposit and some have returnable deposits at the end of the year. Mr. Stycos stated that he had the same concern because he knows some of the textbooks disappear. Mr. Scherza added that this would target those students who cannot afford a musical instrument. Mr. Stycos commented that this type of loan program is really needed. If one watches the band march around and then go into the high school, it is two different groups of people.

Mr. Lupino asked Mr. Scherza if he would target only Title 1 schools because there are a couple of schools, because of a school closing, that are now marginal schools. Mr. Scherza responded that this was Mr. Colozzi's proposal, and he would not want to give the committee the impression that he was coming up with something when it was Mr. Colozzi who made the proposal. Mr. Colozzi responded that the proposal would target Title 1 schools, but it is not exclusive to Title 1 schools. If there is an individual or some students at a school such as Oak Lawn who are in the same situation, then it won't be for just certain schools. These instruments will generally float around the

system as needed. One of the criteria could be that a student would have to qualify for the School Lunch Program.

Mr. Traficante asked if this contract had a built-in maintenance program, and Mr. Colozzi responded that it did not. Mr. Balducci added that it could be a warranty issue built into the contract. Mr. Lupino asked if there were any health issues with woodwinds, and Mr. Colozzi commented that in the newspaper recently there was an article regarding a dentist who is using dental instruments to sterilize school-owned instruments or a used instrument that someone purchased. It is being reported that germs can live up to five months. Music programs throughout the country wouldn't be able to function if it weren't for instruments that are school owned for students to use. There is an issue with sterilization or cleanliness of the instruments. The guesstimate cost is \$80 to sterilize an instrument.

Mr. Lupino asked how much a better-quality trumpet in this contract would cost, and Mr. Colozzi stated that a student-model instrument would cost \$300 to \$350 range and \$400 in some cases. The good student model violins would cost approximately \$500. Through the lease program, the cost is reduced because the district would be buying in quantity. Mr. Balducci added that violins would cost \$480 each and trumpets would cost \$280. Mr. Lupino asked if a student who is talented with an instrument could keep it over a period of time and then buy it from the district at a certain time at a discount price. Mrs. Greifer commented that once a student reaches a certain level of

proficiency, the beginner's model is no longer adequate. Mr. Colozzi added that as students grow, they go into a fuller size model by the time they get to high school. He noted that not all purchases would be for individual instruments. Some of them that are pricier, those purchases are \$3,000 and \$4,000, and they never have enough money to make that large a purchase; but they are instruments that are sorely needed. Western Hills Middle School needs a new concert tuba as well as Park View. Mr. Scherza added that Cranston East will have a full orchestra this year. Mr. Colozzi commented that this year at Cranston East and Cranston West they will have a full orchestra. The strings finally came to the high school, and there are twenty-five strings at Cranston East and a few less at Cranston West. The fruits of seven years of strings education is coming to reality. Many districts are asking about the strings program in Cranston and how they accomplished it.

Mr. Stycos asked what the interest rate is for this lease program, and Mr. Balducci responded that he had only the summary of the bid with him. Mr. Stycos commented that the football teams and the bands have their own accounts, and suggested that they could loan the district \$5,000 for this instrument program, and the district could guarantee that they would get it back with a designated interest rate.

By doing this, the district would keep the interest in-house. 12% to 14% on money is a lot to pay. Money could be borrowed from the various groups, and purchase the instruments rather than lease/purchasing them; the instruments would be purchased. As an example, the football team could be approached and suggest that they invest their money in their booster funds and get interest on it. There was a lengthy discussion regarding the possibility of booster clubs being involved in this type of program. Mrs. Greifer indicated that the school district could have a legally binding contract with the lease/purchase company but asked if the school district could have a legally binding contract with the football team. Mr. Nero couldn't see how the athletes would be willing to give up that kind of money. Mr. Scherza commented that the first question to be asked would be if they want to dedicate money to this and secondly if they do how do they want to structure it.

Mr. Scherza stated that he apologized that this happened but he was glad that it was not a shortfall of \$25,000. Mr. Traficante indicated that this program is so successful in boosting the music programs at the middle and high schools, he could not see the committee not continuing it.

Mr. Lupino commented that some of the bands did a traveling program to the elementary schools, and there was a wonderful reaction to the program. Mr. Colozzi should keep promoting programs in that manner. Mr. Colozzi added that the music program

gives free tickets to many of the kids involved in the music program at Bain and Park View Middle School who feed into the music program to encourage their continuation and interest in music.

Page 10 October 11, 2006

Mrs. Greifer remarked that she sees this as another math component. There is very strong evidence that math and music skills are interlinked. Any little thing that can be done to help the students with their mathematical abilities is welcomed. She felt that it was a win-win situation.

Mr. Lupino asked that if there was a consensus among the members if it would be done through a budget revision. Mr. Balducci responded that it was already in the budget and that he could place the lease/purchase on the agenda for approval. He further commented that he may have to re-bid because the vendors hold their prices for thirty to sixty days. He could call the vendor asking for an extension. Mr. Scherza asked that since it was there inadvertently did the committee still want to keep it there, and if they do, how they wanted to apply it. Mr. Traficante remarked that if it works don't fix it. Mr. Stycos stated that it was a good idea. Mr. Lupino stated that administration had a consensus from the committee to go ahead. Mr. Scherza added that it is in the budget in that area.

There was a discussion regarding band uniforms and the need for new ones.

III. Adjourn Work Session

Moved by Mrs. Greifer, seconded by Mr. Stycos and unanimously carried that the work session be adjourned.

There being no further business to come before the work session, it was adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

**Anthony J. Lupino
Clerk**

**Joint Committee for Middle School Reform
Progress Report to the School Committee
Wednesday, October 11, 2006**

- Faculty at all three middle schools met together on the first day of school. Members of the Joint Committee for Middle Level Reform**

provided an overview of the work done to date and an overview of the Breaking Ranks in the Middle text. Each teacher was given a copy of the book. Principals are using the text with their faculties to deepen their understanding and knowledge of programs, structures and best practice at the middle level.

- Each middle school has developed school improvement plans aligned with Breaking Ranks in the Middle and the draft R.I. Middle Level Regulations.**

- The Committee has developed a timeline that will provide Mr. Scherza, the School Committee and the CTA with recommendations regarding personalization, leadership structures and the organization/structures of the schools by December 31st.**

- The Committee has agreed to recommend that it is critical to align structure, curriculum and instructional programs at all three schools; however, each school will develop an implementation plan that meets its unique needs.**

- With regards to leadership structures, the Committee is in the process of determining the needs at each building. We are looking at seemingly effective leadership structures in districts across the state. To date, we have drafted a proposed revised job description for the position of team leader. We are just beginning to look at the issue of content/instructional leaders (as yet unnamed).**

- With regards to personalization, the Committee has recognized that structures such as teaming and after school programs already help to personalize our middle schools. As a result, we have decided to focus on the development of advisories. To date the following has occurred:

- o The school year 2006-2007 is a planning year. The three middle schools have included advisory as a priority area in their school improvement plans this year.

- o Approximately thirty teachers and administrators are currently enrolled in a Rhode Island College graduate level advisory course offered at Bain.

- o The three middle schools will develop a proposed advisory program aligned in scope and content. Each school will design the best structure to meet its unique needs.

- o One recommendation will be to implement an advisory program at each middle school during the 2007-2008 school year. The proposed program will be aligned with the R.I. Middle Level Regulations and Breaking in the Middle recommendations.